DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 098 CG 018 300

AUTHOR Hennessey, Stephen M.
TITLE Public Support for Psychology Licensing Laws in New York State.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Philadelphia, PA, April 6-9, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Certification; Counselor Qualifications; *Psychologists; *Public Opinion; *State Licensing Boards
IDENTIFIERS *New York; New York (Long Island); New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

Recent controversy surrounding the mandatory licensing of psychologists in New York State has provoked the need for research investigations in this area. The present study was conducted to assess the degree of public support for psychology licensing among persons residing in the Long Island/New York City area. Public support for psychology licensing was assessed through the administration of a short survey to 310 men and women of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The results indicated strong public support for the present New York State psychology licensing law. Approximately 85 percent of the survey participants responded in a prolicensing direction to each survey question. The overall pattern of results suggested that most persons residing in the Long Island/New York City area view licensing credentials as one important index of a practitioners competence as a psychotherapist. In this respect the opinions of the general public are harmonious with the basic assumptions underlying New York State psychology legislation. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED258098

Public Support For Psychology Licensing Laws In New York State

Stephen M. Hennessey

Hofstra University

CG 018300

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stephen M. Hennessey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Recent controversy surrounding the mandatory licensing of psychologists in New York State has provoked the need for research investigations in this area. The present study was conducted to assess the degree of public support for psychology licensing among persons residing in the Long Island/New York City area. Public support for psychology licensing was assessed through the administration of a short survey to 310 men and women of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The results indicated strong public support for the present New York State psychology licensing law. Approximately 85% of the survey participants responded in a prolicensing direction to each survey question. The overall pattern of results suggested that most persons residing in the Long Island/New York City area view licensing credentials as one important index of a practitioners competence as a psychotherapist. In this respect the opinions of the general public are harmonious with the basic assumptions underlying New York State psychology legislation.

Public Support For Psychology Licensing Laws

In New York State

In 1979 Daniel Hogan published a four-volume series entitled "The Regulation of Psychotherapists." In this work he argued that the criteria traditionally used to license psychologists, e.g., a candidate's level of educational attainment in psychology or a person's performance on written psychology examinations, were not correlated to a practitioner's competence as a psychotherapist. In the first volume of this work, "A Study in the Philosophy and Practice of Professional Regulation," Hogan writes:

> There is no evidence that licensing requirements measure significant factors. The emphasis on educational degrees, for instance, assumes that such degrees are a valid and reliable measure of competence (p. 255)...
>
> ...academic grades, licensing examination, intelligence tests, and aptitude tests have not been shown to have any correlation with the skills needed to practice therapy or any other professional endeavor effectively (p. 268).

Daniel Hogan and other opponents of licensing have asserted that licensing laws certify an inappropriately small number of practitioners. In New York and many other states, only psychiatrists and registered psychologists are eligible to receive insurance reimbursement for diagnostic and psychotherapeutic services (American Psychological Association, 1979; American Psychological Association, 1980; New York State Insurance Law). Some authors have argued that these regulations are unfair and discriminatory because they prevent unlicensed

persons from receiving insurance reimbursement for psychotherapeutic services (Siegel, 1981). These authors have fought for the abolition of psychology licensing laws and the adoption of open-ended registration schemes "under which practitioners would simply state their credentials and practice in whatever manner and under any title they choose." (Siegel, 1981, p. 5).

Recent research has suggested that most persons in the Long Island/New York City area are sufficiently familiar with the credentials and functions of psychologists to formulate an opinion of the licensing issue. Gould, Seiler, and Silberman (1983) surveyed 136 persons of varying socioeconomic characteristics residing in the Long Island/New York City area. The survey results indicated that 72% of the sample were aware that psychologists typically possessed a PhD degree, while only 12% mistakenly believed that psychologists possessed an MD degree. The survey results also indicated that a significant majority of survey respondents were aware of the distinction between psychologists and psychiatrists. In addition, 73% of the survey respondents indicated that they believed psychologists were licensed in New York State.

In the present study a short questionnaire was devised to assess the degree of public support for the present psychology licensing law in New York State. This survey included a short description of licensing requirements and a short summary of the current licensing controversy. The format of this questionnaire represented a revision of an earlier survey on the public's

attitude toward psychology licensing in New York State (Hennessey, Hoffman, & Neziroglu, 1980).

Method

Subjects

During the Spring of 1982, 310 men and women residing in the Long Island/New York City area were surveyed regarding their support for the present psychology licensing law. The surveys were administered by 45 psychology graduate students who solicited subjects from a broad range of age and socioeconomic levels. Surveys were administered to subjects in such locations as shopping malls, bus stations, and train stations. An examination of the demographic characteristics of the sample revealed that the sample closely approximated New York State census figures with respect to age and occupation (see Tables 1 and 2). The numbers of males and females answering the survey were nearly equivalent: 49.5% of the survey respondents were male and 50.5% of the respondents were female.

Procedure

In order to test the hypothesis that most adults in New York State favored the licensing of psychologists, a short questionnaire was developed which included four questions. Each question required a "yes" or a "no" response from participants. A counterbalancing procedure was adopted in which a "yes" response indicated a prolicensing attitude on questions one and three while a "no" response indicated a prolicensing attitude on questions two and four. This counterbalancing procedure was designed to control for the possible influence of response sets such as acquiescence and negativism (Chronbach, 1946).

Table 1

Occupational Distribution of Survey Sample Compared With New York State Census Figures

Occupational Group	Percent in Survey Sample (N = 268)	Percent in New York State
1	21.1	17.5
2	40.7	41.7
3	8.2	10.4
4	29.4	26.1
5	.4	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Note. The occupational groups were defined as follows:
1. Professional specialty occupations, technologists, and technicians.
2. Executive, sales, and administrative support occupations.
3. Precision production, craft, and repair occupations.
4. Service occupations, farm managers, machine operators, and fabricators.
5. Farm workers, forestry, and fishing occupations, handlers, and laborers.

These data were obtained from Table 68, "Occupation of Employed Persons: 1980." U.S. Bureau of the Census (1983). 1980 census of the population. Vol. 1. Chapter C. Part 34. (Series PC80-1-C34). Washington D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office.

Table 2

Age Distribution of Survey Sample Compared With New York State Census Figures

Age Group	Percent in Survey Sample (N = 307)	Percent in New York State
18-29	38.4	27.9
30-39	24.4	19.1
40-49	15.6	14.3
50-59	12.7	15.4
60+	8.5	23.3
Total	100.0	100.0

These data were obtained from Table 18, "Single Years of Age by Race, Spanish Origin, and Sex: 1980." U.S. Bureau of the Census (1982). 1980 Census of the population. Vol. 1. Characteristics of the population. Chapter B. Part 34. (Series PC80-1-B34). Washington D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office.

One additional survey question was included to assess the face validity of the questionnaire. In this question subjects were asked to indicate whether they believed the questionnaire was fair and unbiased.

The students administering the survey were instructed not to reveal their own attitudes toward licensing during the administration of the survey. This guideline was adopted to ensure that subjects were not influenced by the attitudes of the persons administering the survey.

Results and Discussion

Each of the four survey questions elicited a prolicensing response from roughly 85% of the survey respondents. In response to the first question, "Do you believe that the present licensing laws are in the public's best interest?", 85.2% of the sample responded in a prolicensing direction, 14.5% responded in an antilicensing direction, while .3% did not answer this question. A chi-square test revealed that a significant majority of persons had responded in a prolicensing direction to this survey question $(1, N = 309) = 155.21, p<.001$.

In response to the second question, "If your child had a psychological problem, would you bring him/her to an unlicensed psychotherapist?", a significant majority of subjects indicated that they would not bring their child to such a therapist $(1, N = 307) = 167.85, p<.001$. Of the 310 respondents, 12.9% indicated that they would bring their child to an unlicensed therapist, 86.1% indicated that they would not bring their child to an unlicensed therapist, while 1% did not respond to this question.

In response to the third question, "Do you believe that a PhD in psychology is an important credential for psychotherapists?", 83.9% of the sample indicated that they believed a PhD was an important credential, 15.5% indicated that it was not important, while .6% did not to respond to this question. Persons responding in a prolicensing direction to this question represented a significant majority of the present sample $(1, N = 308) = 145.9, p<.001$.

In response to the fourth question, "Do you think people who do not meet current licensing standards should treat patients?", 13.2% of the sample indicated that unlicensed persons should treat patients, 83.9% indicated that unlicensed persons should not treat patients, while 2.9% did not respond to this question. A significant majority of persons responded in a prolicensing direction to this question $(1, N = 301) = 159.3, p<.001$.

In response to the final question, "Do you believe this questionnaire was fair and unbiased?", 85.8 of the sample indicated that they believed the questionnaire was fair and unbiased, 11% indicated that the questionnaire was not fair and unbiased, while 3.2% did not respond to this question. A significant majority of persons indicated that they believed the questionnaire was fair and unbiased $(1, N = 300) = 179.4, p<.001$.

A close examination of the survey results revealed that very few persons responded in an antilicensing direction to more than a single survey question. Of the 310 survey respondents, 10.6% responded in a antilicensing direction to one survey question, 3.9% responded in an antilicensing direction to two survey

questions, 3.6% responded in this direction to three questions, while only 1.3% responded in an antilicensing direction to four survey questions. In total, 19.4% of the present sample responded in an antilicensing direction to one or more survey questions.

Table 3 displays the intercorrelations which were obtained among the four survey questions. The correlations ranged from .259 to .539 and each correlation was significant at the $p<.001$ level. These correlational results suggested that each of the survey questions measured a common attitude toward licensing.

The results of this study suggest that the public supports psychology licensing laws because they believe that licensing credentials are related to a practitioner's competence as a psychotherapist. In this respect the opinions of the majority of persons in the downstate New York area are consistent with the assumptions underlying the present licensing law. Although persons opposed to the licensing law view licensing credentials with suspicion, this view is not widely held among persons living in the downstate New York area.

Additional studies are needed to establish whether the present findings are applicable to persons living in other geographical regions. It would be interesting to discover whether persons residing in other sections of New York State or in other states, support psychology licensing laws to the same extent as the respondents in the present survey. Studies of this type would contribute to our understanding of the social forces influencing the shape of psychology legislation in America.

Table 3

Intercorrelation of Survey Questions

Question	2	3	4
1	.359	.368	.259
2	-	.416	.539
3		-	.448

Note. All correlations are significant at the $p<.001$ level.

References

American Psychological Association (1979). Psychology as a health care profession. Washington, D.C.: Author.

American Psychological Association (1980). Brief of American Psychological Association as amicus curiae. American Psychologist. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Chronbach, L. J. (1946). Response sets and test validity. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 6, 475-494.

Gould, J., Seiler, R., & Silberman, J. (1983). The public's opinion of the credentials and functions of psychologists as compared to other mental health professionals. Unpublished master's thesis. Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

Hennessey, S. M., Hoffman, J., & Neziroglu, T. (1980). Assessment of public attitude towards the current issue of continued licensing of psychologists. Unpublished master's thesis, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.

Hogan, D. (1979). The regulation of psychotherapists (Vol. 1). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company.

Siegel, M. A. (1981, March). Background paper. The regulation of mental health practitioners. (Available from Mark Siegel, Room 728, 270 Broadway, NY, NY 10007).